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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a needs assessment study designed to identify critical needs in Virginia's English as a Second Language (ESL) education in order to design an appropriate ESL endorsement program at James Madison University. The study involved a statewide sample of K-12 schools with ESL programs. A total of 330 questionnaires were sent to 24 school divisions. The questionnaire asked about: (1) community characteristics; (2) the respondent's primary responsibility; (3) the respondent's language proficiencies; (4) faculty and student cultural diversity; (5) the number of students with limited English proficiency (LEP); (6) presence and characteristics of LEP/ESL programs, (7) LEP/ESL teachers' needs, (8) types of skills teacher education programs should emphasize; (9) resources to benefit to LEP/ESL teachers; (10) major needs of LEP/ESL students; and (11) recommendations for improvement of K-12 ESL education in Virginia. Results from the 200 returned surveys indicated that teacher preparation programs should emphasize more hands-on teaching and model active classroom teaching to better prepare prospective teachers to work with non-native students. Respondents indicated that the greatest needs were having a well-designed ESL syllabus, updated materials, consistent assessment measures, more experienced personnel, more resources, and better prepared professionals to enter the field. Most schools had an ESL program. An appendix presents the survey instrument. (SM)

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ED 411 241

State-wide Needs Assessment in ESL Education: Findings

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the most critical needs in ESL education in the state of Virginia in order to design an ESL endorsement program at James Madison University that addresses these specific needs and takes into consideration the respondents' recommendations.

Methodology

Prior to conducting a state-wide needs assessment study on ESL education, a team of five JMU professors developed an assessment instrument which was administered in the regional schools in Summer 1996. Information from the instrument used for the regional assessment allowed for further refinement of the survey instrument administered at the state level. The new survey included thirteen statements with fixed and multiple choice alternatives as well as open-ended questions. The survey instrument is presented in Appendix A.

The method used for the selection of the sample was twofold. Once it was decided that the sample should be a purposive sample, the first part of the sample selection phase involved identifying school divisions that should be included in the sample. The criteria used for selecting the sample was "picking" school districts that would hypothetically attract JMU students for employment purposes, due to geographical convenience or to the demand of ESL teachers in the area.

Twenty-four school divisions were selected on the basis of geographical areas and statistics (i.e., number of schools versus number of students identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

The second part of the sample selection involved contacting the selected schools to find out the exact number of ESL teachers or teachers involved in ESL education in each of the schools. The purpose in contacting each school was: 1.) to communicate to the principal or school personnel that a survey was being sent to the school; and 2.) to find out the exact number of questionnaires that should be mailed to each school.

A total of 330 questionnaires were sent to the twenty-four school divisions. 200 of the original 330 questionnaires were returned (60 percent return rate).

Findings

Question 1 requested information on the community. The findings show that: 65% of the respondents work in a suburban area, 19% in an urban area, 10% in a rural school, and 6% in a small town.

Question 2 focused on the respondent's primary responsibility. 89% of the respondents were teachers, 4% principals, 2% counselors, 1% administrators, 1% assistant principals, and 3% of the respondents have responsibilities other than the ones listed in the survey. Question 2 also requested information on grade levels taught. 24% of the respondents work with high school students 9th through 12th grades. 23% with 6th through 8th grades, 20% with nursery/kindergarten through 5th grades, 17% with NK through 3rd grades, 2% work with all grade levels, and 8% with "other." The category "other" includes special education, art, music, etc. Still part of Question 2,

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it was requested that respondents provide information on the number of years of teaching experience. 32% of the respondents reported having from 11 to 20 years of teaching experience, 31% from 4 to 10 years, 21% have more than 20 years of experience, 9% have less than 3 years of teaching experience.

Question 3 focused on the respondent's proficiency in a language other than English. 71% reported having proficiency in a foreign language, 29% reported having no proficiency in a second language. Still part of Question 3, if the respondent stated having proficiency in a language other than English, he/she was requested to specify which language. 94% of the respondents reported having proficiency in Spanish; 55% in French; 14% in German; 5% in Arabic, Korean and Russian; 4% in Chinese, Italian and Vietnamese; 3% in Hebrew and Japanese; 2% in Dutch, Farsi, Portuguese and Serbian. African, Greek, Hungarian, Kisukuma, Kiswahili, Latin, Romanian, Swahili, Swedish, Taiwanese, and Turkish had one response. Question 3 also requested the respondent to specify their level of proficiency in the language or languages spoken. 74% reported being very proficient, 59% somewhat proficient, and 42% not very proficient.

Question 4 focused on the diversity of the faculty in the participating schools. 10% of the schools reported having very diverse faculty, 51% somewhat diverse, 35% not very diverse, and 4% were blank responses.

Question 5 investigated diversity in the student population of the schools surveyed. 61% of the schools reported having a very diverse student body, 31% somewhat diverse, 7% not very diverse, and 1% were blank responses.

Question 6 requested information on the total number of LEP students the respondents have in their classrooms. 35% reported having 100% of LEP students, 5% reported having between 90 and 60% of their population LEP, 10% between 59 and 30%, 15% between 29 and 11, 17% between 10 and 5%, 12% have less than 5% of LEP students in their classrooms, and 6% were blank responses.

Question 7 asked if the school has an LEP/ESL program. 96% reported having such a program, 1% reported not having such a program, and 3% were blank responses.

Question 8 was primarily for those with an LEP/ESL program in their school. It asked respondents to classify each statement as a strength or deficiency of their ESL program.

The first statement was: having a designated classroom for ESL instruction. 79% reported it as a strength of their school, 13% as a deficiency, and 8% left this statement blank.

The second statement was: having an LEP/ESL sheltered program to meet the most immediate linguistic needs of newcomers before they are mainstreamed into their regular classes. 50% marked it as a strength, 38% as a deficiency, and 12% of the respondents left this statement blank.

The third statement was: having a bilingual education program to help students consolidate certain concepts. 16% marked it as a strength, 58% as a deficiency, and 26% left this statement blank.

The fourth statement was: having a team of teachers to discuss the academic performance, progress and behavior of LEP/ESL students in different classes of various content areas. 54% marked it as a strength, 33% as a deficiency, and 13% left this statement blank.

The fifth statement was: having availability of qualified ESL teachers. 80% marked it as a strength, 12% as a deficiency, and 8% left this statement blank.

The sixth statement was: having availability of appropriate instructional materials for the different levels of language ability. 65% marked it as a strength, 25% as a deficiency, and 10% left this statement blank.

Other strengths added were:

- an inclusion model; supportive administration and faculty;
- ability to individualize instruction to students who need it;
- good cooperation between ESL, classroom, and special resource teachers to serve children in many areas;
- well integrated school social life for ESL students; freedom to adjust curriculum to needs of LEP students;
- a generous budget for materials;
- classes designed for specific needs;
- computer available in the classroom;
- administrators in the Central Office in charge of curriculum and student registration.

Other deficiencies added were:

- high teacher/student ratio;
- no ESL curriculum;
- teachers having little time with students having to commute from school to school;
- need for appropriate assessment materials;
- limited teaching space;
- grouping of various grades at the same time in the same room;
- lack of training in reading by ESL teachers;
- scheduling problem;
- not enough funding to buy suitable books and materials;
- insufficient number of class periods of ESL instruction.

Question 9 deals with the most critical needs LEP/ESL teachers have in the surveyed schools. This question followed a Likert scale format and requested respondents to indicate the degree of need for each statement given.

The first statement focused on the need for updated materials appropriate for the different language proficiency levels of nonnative learners. 29% of the respondents reported this as being much needed; 41% as somewhat needed; 21% as not much needed; 5% as not needed at all; 4% were blank responses.

The second statement focused on the need for workshops on current developments in second language teaching methods to better carry the educational goals of the program. 17% of the respondents reported this as being much needed; 40% as somewhat needed; 29% as not much needed; 10% as not needed at all; 4% were blank responses.

The third statement focused on the need for a well-designed LEP/ESL syllabus. 35% of the respondents reported this as being much needed; 28% as somewhat needed; 21% as not much needed; 11% as not needed at all; 5% were blank responses.

The fourth statement focused on the need for an effective assessment system that provides a more accurate profile of the learner's abilities. 34% of the respondents reported this as being much needed; 34% as somewhat needed; 21% as not much needed; 7% as not needed at all; 4% were blank responses.

The fifth statement focused on the need for tutors to ease nonnative students' transition into regular content-area classes. 41% of the respondents reported this as being much needed; 35% as somewhat needed; 14% as not much needed; 6% as not needed at all; 4% were blank responses.

Other needs were:

- materials/resources/personnel. This category involves updated computer programs, ESL instructional materials for content areas, programs to reach parents, well-trained teachers, computers, more classroom space, teacher training sessions, administrators that are sensitive to the needs of LEP students, more communication between ESL and content-area teachers, lower teacher/student ration in ESL classes, translators.
- bilingual program/bilingual staff.
- assessment criteria (ESL exit test)/specific goals that ESL students should meet before being mainstreamed/grade level guide.
- a sheltered program for beginning level students to provide them with survival skills in the target language until they are able to communicate and function in the target culture.

Question 10 focused on the types of skills teacher preparation programs should emphasize to better prepare teachers to work with LEP/ESL students K-12 in the school systems. Respondents were asked to circle the skills they believed should be reinforced.

The most voted skill was strategies to provide faster development of the learner's language skills - listening, reading, writing, and speaking. 77% of the respondents felt this is the most important skill to be emphasized in teacher preparation programs.

The second most voted skill was current second language teaching methods. 68% of the people surveyed believed this to be the second most needed skill to be reinforced.

The third most voted skills were: 1.) stronger knowledge on the theoretical framework of second language acquisition and processing; and 2.) organization and curriculum development in ESL. 67% of the people surveyed believed these to be the third most needed skills to be reinforced in teacher preparation programs.

The fourth most voted skill was assessment of the abilities of speakers of other languages with 61% of the vote.

The last most voted skill was evaluation of instructional materials with 54% of the vote.

Other skills suggested as important components of teacher preparation programs were:

- training. This category involves sensitivity training for acceptance of other culture groups, experience and knowledge of different cultural groups, training on classroom management of multilevel ESL classes, curriculum development and training to teach content areas, instruction in the great variety of learning styles, preparation in how to work with content area teachers, training in reading/literacy research, stronger understanding of second language acquisition.
- exposure to literacy instruction.
- experience abroad.
- dual certification. For non-ESL teachers, knowledge of second language learning should be a must.

Question 11 focused on the types of resources considered beneficial to the LEP/ESL teachers in the surveyed schools. Respondents were asked to circle the resources they considered to be the most beneficial.

The most voted resource was found to be information on classroom materials designed for LEP/ESL students - 69%.

The second most voted resource was bringing guest speakers to talk about ESL education in the various content areas - 55%.

The third most voted resource was workshops in ESL - 47%.

The fourth most voted resource was courses in ESL education in an institution of higher education - 31%.

Other resources mentioned by the respondents were:

- ESL teachers working jointly with non-ESL teachers and with other ESL teachers;
- different types of workshops. Workshops in reading, in methods for mainstream teachers, in computer materials for ESL instruction;
- instructional materials and computer resources, specifically software for ESL;
- better trained teachers;
- guest speakers from other cultures.

Question 12 dealt with the major needs of LEP/ESL students. This question also followed a Likert Scale, and respondents were asked to classify each statement in terms of degree of need.

The first statement focused on the need for the student to be able to understand oral directions. 67% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 21% felt it was somewhat needed; 7% considered it not much needed; no respondents considered it not needed at all; 5% of the responses were blank for this statement.

The second statement focused on the need for the student to be more cohesive in writing assignments. 60% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 32% felt it was somewhat needed; 2% considered it not much needed; 1% felt it not needed at all; 5% of the responses were blank for this statement.

The third statement focused on the need for the student to use correct verb tenses in oral and written tasks. 41% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 42% felt it was somewhat needed; 9% considered it not much needed; 1% considered it not needed at all; 7% of the responses were blank for this statement.

The fourth statement focused on the need for the student to have more opportunities to actively interact with native speakers. 34% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 31% felt it was somewhat needed; 23% considered it not much needed; 6% considered it not needed at all; 6% of the responses were blank for this statement.

The fifth statement focused on the need for the student to be encouraged to talk about his or her own culture. 30% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 43% felt it was somewhat needed; 19% considered it not much needed; 2% considered it not needed at all; 6% of the responses were blank for this statement.

The sixth statement focused on the need for the student to have a learning environment that decreases inhibitions. 40% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 30% felt it was somewhat needed; 20% considered it not much needed; 3% considered it not needed at all; 7% of the responses were blank for this statement.

The seventh statement focused on the need for the student to use correct verb tenses in oral and written tasks. 41% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 42% felt it was somewhat needed; 9% considered it not much needed; 1% considered it not needed at all; 7% of the responses were blank for this statement.

The eighth statement focused on the need for the student to be given different types of assessment so that the learner's abilities can be identified more accurately. 50% of the respondents felt this was much needed by their students; 29% felt it was somewhat needed; 10% considered it not much needed; 5% considered it not needed at all; 6% of the responses were blank for this statement.

Other suggestions on the need of LEP/ESL students were:

- literacy development in their native language as well as in the foreign language;
- development in spelling;

- clubs that foster students' cultures and help them build up their self-confidence;
- more opportunities to help ESL students become more socially integrated with the student body and with teachers;
- more opportunities to help ESL students be better prepared for mainstreaming;
- higher expectations for ESL students;
- a valid non-verbal assessment tool to determine the real needs of the students.

Question 13 focused on recommendations for the improvement of ESL education K-12 in Virginia. Respondents expressed the need for:

- materials;
- full time ESL teachers;
- more communication with parents/families;
- training for regular classroom teachers;
- more classroom time;
- clearly defined standards;
- exiting criteria and assessment;
- increased funding;
- programs for parents;
- lower teacher/student ratio;
- more sensitivity towards students and teachers in ESL programs;
- mandatory ESL experience for regular classroom teachers;
- workshops;
- certification requirements for ESL positions;
- more planning time;
- more practical experience and active classroom teaching for student teachers;
- more tutors;
- increased communication between curriculum specialists, teachers, parents and students to identify needs;
- continuous staff development programs;
- assessment tools for identifying student learning styles and deficiencies;
- closer relationship between ESL and mainstream classroom teachers;
- uniformity and organization;
- computers;
- change in the requirements for students who arrive as 11th and 12th graders;
- newer and easier ways to mainstream students.

Conclusions and Future Directions

A study such as the one described here presents valuable information for teacher educators and administrators involved in the development of programs for ESL teachers and students. This study has sought to identify the most critical needs in ESL education in the state of Virginia. It has considered the recommendations made by the respondents as the framework for the development of an ESL licensure program at James Madison University with the purpose of addressing those needs.

Upon reviewing the data, a number of respondents agreed that the greatest needs of educators in the field of language instruction lie on having a well-designed ESL syllabus, consistent assessment measurements, more experienced personnel to work with this student population, more resources, and better prepared professionals to enter the field. Respondents also reported that they

need increased financial support from the state to be able to improve the learning conditions of learners identified as Limited English Proficient.

It was encouraging to see that the great majority of the schools surveyed have an ESL program to assist nonnative students in their linguistic needs. Clearly it is necessary to continue to provide strong encouragement as well as good teaching and learning conditions so that these students can develop their language skills faster and more effectively. However, it is also important that specific course guidelines, goals and assessment instruments be developed in a more consistent fashion so that teachers can help students experience not only linguistic benefits but also affective development.

The data also show that there is a need for closer communication and interaction between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers. This communication may help teachers better guide their ESL students to achieve maximum results. It is also important to recognize that greater communication among educators may help change some of the misconceptions a lot of teachers still hold towards foreign students and decrease student frustration.

Before ending, it is important to briefly summarize the immediate consequences that this study has had in the ESL teacher education program at James Madison University. JMU is currently offering a class on Second Language Acquisition whose major feature is its strong emphasis on application of theory in real classroom situations. Students taking this class are required to test research findings and theoretical statements in a live teaching environment. This set up resulted from the many recommendations given by survey respondents that prospective teachers should have a more practical and direct exposure to the field of second language teaching instead of an essentially theoretical orientation. The second course coming up in Fall 1997 is the Cross-Cultural Education class. The purpose of this class is to increase student teachers' awareness about the cultural differences among peoples and how to handle these differences in a teaching environment. In addition, considering that assessment was consistently addressed by the respondents as important knowledge future ESL teachers should have, we are developing an ESL assessment class to be included in the schedule in Fall 1998. The development of these classes are JMU's interest in establishing a strong ESL licensure program at the undergraduate level that will help improve the scenario of English as a Second Language education in Virginia.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

VIRGINIA ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAMS:
A STATE-WIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY
James Madison University

Name of School_____
Name of person completing the questionnaire_____
Address_____
_____
Phone number_____
Fax number_____
E-mail address_____
Date_____

* LEP refers to Limited English Proficiency. ESL refers to English as a Second Language. Both terms refer to learners whose primary language is not English, or programs designed for these nonnative speakers.

Check one response from each item below:

1. Please indicate which one best describes your community:
   a. urban
   b. suburban
   c. rural
   d. a small town

2. Please describe your primary responsibility:
   a. administrator
   b. principal
   c. assistant principal
   d. teacher (If you checked d, please answer the two sub-entries below)
   - Grade level grouping?
     _____ NK-3rd grades
     _____ 4th-5th grades
     _____ 6th-8th grades
     _____ 9th-12th grades
     _____ other (e.g., special education, art, music, etc.)
   - Number of years of teaching experience?
     _____ less than one year - 3 years
     _____ 4 - 10 years
     _____ 11 - 20 years
     _____ more than 20 years
   e. other:_____

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3. Do you have any proficiency in a language other than English?

_____ Yes
_____ No

If yes, which language?_____
Level of proficiency?

_____ very proficient _____ somewhat proficient _____ not very proficient

4. How culturally diverse is the faculty at your school?

_____ very diverse _____ somewhat diverse _____ not very diverse

5. How culturally diverse is the student body at your school?

_____ very diverse _____ somewhat diverse _____ not very diverse

6. Of the total number of students you have, what percentage have limited English proficiency? _____%

7. Do you have an LEP/ESL program at your school?

_____ Yes _____ No

8. If you have an LEP/ESL program at your school, please answer #8; otherwise go to # 9. Classify the following statements as strengths or deficiencies of the program by writing ***S*** for strength and ***D*** for deficiency next to each statement.

_____ a designated classroom for English as a Second Language instruction;
_____ an LEP/ESL sheltered program to meet the most immediate linguistic needs of newcomers before they are mainstreamed into their regular classes;
_____ a bilingual education program to help students consolidate certain concepts;
_____ a team of teachers to discuss the academic performance, progress and behavior of LEP/ESL students in different classes of various content areas;
_____ availability of qualified English as a Second Language teachers;
_____ availability of appropriate instructional materials for the different levels of language ability;

Other strengths and/or deficiencies not listed. Please write them here:_____
_____
_____
_____

9. What do you consider to be the greatest needs LEP/ESL teachers have in your school? Please use the following scale.

1= much needed, 2=somewhat needed, 3=not much needed, 4=not needed at all

a.	updated classroom materials appropriate for the different language proficiency levels of nonnative learners;	1	2	3	4
b.	workshops on current developments in second language teaching methods to better carry the educational goals of the program;	1	2	3	4

c.	a well-designed LEP/ESL syllabus;	1	2	3	4
d.	an effective assessment system that provides a more accurate profile of the learner's abilities;	1	2	3	4
e.	tutors to ease nonnative students' transition into regular content-area classes;	1	2	3	4
f.	other (please write them here):_____				

10. What type(s) of skills do teacher education programs need to emphasize to better prepare teachers to work with LEP/ESL students K-12 in the school systems? Check the appropriate response(s).

a. strategies to provide faster development of the learner's language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking);
b. stronger knowledge on the theoretical framework of second language acquisition and processing;
c. evaluation of instructional materials;
d. organization and curriculum development in English as a Second Language;
e. current second language teaching methods;
f. assessment of the abilities of speakers of other languages;
g. other (please specify):_____

11. What type(s) of resources would you consider beneficial to the LEP/ESL teachers in your school? Check the appropriate response(s).

a. workshops in English as a Second Language;
b. courses in ESL education in an institution of higher learning;
c. more information on classroom materials designed for LEP/ESL students;
d. guest speakers to talk about ESL education in the various content areas;
e. other (please specify):_____

12. What would you consider to be the major needs of your LEP/ESL students? ? Please use the following scale.

1= much needed, 2=somewhat needed, 3=not much needed, 4=not needed at all

a.	to be able to understand oral directions;	1	2	3	4
b.	to be more cohesive in writing assignments;	1	2	3	4
c.	to use correct verb tenses in oral and in written tasks;	1	2	3	4
d.	to have more opportunities to actively interact with native speakers;	1	2	3	4
e.	to be encouraged to talk about their own culture;	1	2	3	4
f.	to have a learning environment that decreases inhibitions;	1	2	3	4

g.	to be involved in purely physical activities to avoid the necessity of verbal responses;	1	2	3	4
h.	to be given different types of assessment so that the learner's abilities can be identified more accurately;	1	2	3	4
i.	other (please specify):_____				

13. In the space below, please specify your recommendations for the improvement of ESL education K-12 in Virginia.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!